

This Week in Congress

February 5, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Opposing Spending Bill that Ignores Kansas Priorities

The needs of Kansans - our military men and women and our farmers and ranchers - were ignored this week in the House. I voted against the spending bill for 2007 on Wednesday because it puts the growth of Fort Riley at risk and fails to include agriculture disaster assistance. The bill under funds the implementation of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commitments by \$3 billion, providing less than half of what the Department of Defense requested. It also does not include an amendment I offered to aid farmers and ranchers suffering from the effects of natural disasters.

Last month, I asked Democratic leadership to include funding in the spending bill to allow for critically important military construction and quality of life projects to move forward. Unfortunately, this bill puts at risk more than \$300 million in BRAC-related and other military construction that has been authorized for Fort Riley in 2007, including a division headquarters, a combat aviation brigade complex, runway improvements and a health clinic. Our soldiers at Fort Riley, their families and the surrounding communities who have welcomed them deserve better treatment.

Also this week, I offered an amendment to the spending bill to cover agriculture losses incurred in 2005, 2006 or 2007 from natural disasters. I am disappointed this spending bill does not include something that is of high priority to me and many of my colleagues. As Congress works on this year's spending bills, I encourage my colleagues to look for other opportunities to provide desperately needed aid to our agriculture community. [Click here](#) to view a video clip of a speech I gave to the House of Representatives.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Releases 2007 Farm Bill Proposal

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released its 2007 Farm Bill proposal. This is a lengthy proposal that touches every aspect of the current farm bill. Although I have just begun to examine the proposal, at first glance, I believe some ideas may have merit.

Other ideas, however, have caused me some concern. According to USDA, its proposal would increase farm bill funding above that which the current farm bill would provide over the next five years. This assumption, however, is based on USDA's prediction that commodity prices will remain high over this time period. What remains to be seen is whether the USDA's proposal will provide adequate funding if commodity prices decline. The proposal also fails to provide a fair balance among commodities. It is disappointing that, despite acknowledgement by USDA that commodities like wheat were not treated fairly in the 2002 Farm Bill, USDA's proposal broadens the disproportionate treatment among commodities.

While I appreciate the Administration's interest, it is important to remember that Congress is responsible for writing the farm bill. I am first interested in listening to the thoughts and concerns of farmers and ranchers. In creating the next farm bill, I will consider the USDA's proposal along with information the House Agriculture Committee collected from field hearings across the country, including input from experts and comments from Kansas producers. To share your thoughts on the farm bill with me, please [click here](#).

Veterans Affairs to Open Clinic in Western Kansas or Eastern Colorado

After several years of anticipation, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced its intention to open a veterans' outreach clinic in the western Kansas and eastern Colorado area. The VA is considering locating the new outreach clinic in one of three communities: Goodland, Kansas; Yuma, Colorado; or Burlington, Colorado.

I recently spoke to Lawrence Biro, Director of the VA's Denver region, to encourage a Goodland location. Goodland is centrally located in the underserved region, and the Goodland Regional Medical Center has exceptional facilities and staff available to help serve veterans' health care needs. In 2004, Mr. Biro attended a forum I hosted in Goodland, where nearly 300 veterans gathered to express their support for opening a VA clinic in the community.

The VA outreach clinic will provide basic primary care and mental health services. I applaud the VA's decision to open a clinic to better serve the health care needs of this area's largely rural and elderly veteran population who have had great difficulty accessing care at distant VA facilities.

Rural Residents Experience Problems with DISH TV

Kansans that live in rural areas often receive their weather, news and sports from stations broadcasting from outside of Kansas. An October 2006 ruling by the Florida Court of Appeals, however, ordered DISHTV to stop retransmitting all programming originating on stations affiliated with ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox due to violations of the Satellite Home Viewer Act. The ruling ordered DISHTV to end its retransmissions on or before December 1, 2006. Around this time many Kansans first experienced disruption in their service.

As Congress considers this issue, I will be engaged in attempts to find a solution to this problem. Those with satellite dishes should be allowed to view the network broadcasts they purchase no matter where they live.

Working to Fix Social Security Notch Issue

This week, I was made aware that Kansans are once again receiving fundraising solicitations from interest groups that list my name asking for money to lobby Congress. I want to remind Kansans that I am not part of these fundraising activities. While I appreciate efforts to collectively raise awareness in Congress on specific issues, an effective way to communicate with me is by your personal letter, email or phone call.

Specifically, many Kansans are being solicited for funds to press Congress to fix the Social Security "notch" issue. This issue, which affects many senior citizens in Kansas, began in 1972 when Congress passed legislation tying Social Security benefits to the rate of inflation. Although intended to protect current retirees, Congress quickly realized this legislation could disproportionately increase the benefits for future retirees and bankrupt the system. While efforts were made to protect Social Security, these changes have left recipients with differing benefit levels. I am a sponsor of legislation that would correct the "notch" issue. The Notch Fairness Act would provide those born between 1917 and 1926 with either a \$5,000 lump-sum settlement paid over a four year period or an improved formula for calculating their retirement benefits.

Listening Tour Continues: New Stops Added for This Week

This week, I visited Hoxie, Oberlin, Kinsley and Garfield. On Saturday, I will visit Leoti in Wichita County and Scott City in Scott County. In Leoti, I will be at the Wichita County Business C.A.R.E. Center, 102 West Broadway, from 9:15-10:15 a.m. I will then be in Scott City at Majestic Theater, 420 Main Street, from 10:45-11:45 a.m. [Click here](#) to stay up-to-date on other tour stops still being scheduled.

In the Office

Dennis Cooley and Susan Garlinghouse of Topeka, Cindy D'Ercole and Gary Brunk of Lawrence, and Suzanne Wikle of Shawnee were in this week representing Kansas Action for Children to discuss reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the need for additional child care assistance programs. On Tuesday, I sat down with representatives from Salina, including Dennis Lauver, President and CEO of the Salina Area Chamber; Dennis Kuhlman, Dean at K-State Salina; Jason Gage, Salina City Manager; Mayor Donnie Marrs and his wife, Mona; and Rob Winter, Superintendent of USD 305 to talk about a number of issues. We discussed environmental cleanup at Schilling Air Force Base, reauthorization of No Child Left Behind and the Federal Aviation Administration, Salina's middle income housing project, and the status of installing National Guard arresting gear at Salina's airport.

David McKee of Topeka; Michael Moulin, Denise Koch and Thomas Bryon of Overland Park; and Mike Donald of Lenexa were in with the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Health Underwriters to discuss the Medicare prescription drug program and the importance of long term care insurance. Greg Bauer of Harper, Mary Anne Trickle of Salina, Rodney Roush of Stafford, Keith Becker of Galva, Glennys Doane of Downs and Jim Edwards of Topeka were in with the National School Board Association to explain their priorities for No Child Left Behind.

In with the National Federation of the Blind were Richard Edlund and Pila Mahoney of Kansas City and Tom Page of Wichita to express the need for Braille textbooks in higher education and discuss the status of the Louis Braille commemorative coin. Bruce Bertelsen, Bryan Neal, Allen MacDonald and Howard Blankenship of Olathe, as well as Connie Presley of Wichita, were in with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association to update me on their efforts to improve their contract with the Federal Aviation Administration.

In this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol were Don and Karen Wells of Scott City with their daughter, Whitney Heitman.

Very truly yours,

Jerry